

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Siberian Huskies

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Enjoy activities with
your Husky

Keep your Husky happy
and healthy

Welcome a Husky into
your home

Diane Morgan

English instructor, writer, and happy
owner of many breeds of dog



Siberian Huskies

2nd Edition

by Diane Morgan

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Siberian Huskies For Dummies[®], 2nd Edition

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Introduction

The Siberian wind is a mute wind; there are no trees to make it roar, no grasses to let it sing or whisper. It rushes on, cold and silent, over the endless miles of tundra.

But there is sound, nonetheless. A haunting cry rides the wild wind, a cry chiseled out of frozen air, etched in darkness. Perhaps it is a wolf, for wolves abound here, following the vast herds of reindeer. But maybe not. Perhaps the cry is fuller than the howl of a wolf, sweeter, and more burdened with loneliness. Perhaps it is the song of the first Siberian Husky ever born.

Welcome to the world of the Siberian Husky. If you've ever wondered why your Siberian is different from all the other breeds, you've come to the right place. This book explains what made your Siberian the way he is and how you can get the most out of your relationship with this engaging, unique, and totally original breed. This is a book that will make your life — and your Siberian's — richer, more satisfying, and a lot more fun.

About This Book

Siberian Huskies For Dummies, 2nd Edition, dives into what you need to know about Husky ownership, covering everything from finding a Husky to training the one you have. I include the following information:

- » **Part 1:** Here I explain the Husky's many fine qualities and needs, so you can better understand the breed. I also share some interesting tidbits about the breed's history, how Huskies got to the West, and what they're like today.
- » **Part 2:** In this part, you discover where you can get a Husky and how you can prepare for your new dog's arrival.
- » **Part 3:** Getting your Husky used to his new home is important. Here I provide useful tips so you can understand what your Husky is communicating with you and ways you can help socialize him with children, people, and other animals. I offer advice on how to train him to be a well-behaved member of your family, and I also share pointers to deal with behavior problems.

- » **Part 4:** More than anything, you want to make sure your Husky is healthy and safe. In this part, I give you the essentials on everything from feeding to grooming to choosing a veterinarian to dealing with general health problems.
- » **Part 5:** Huskies are great outdoor dogs, and here I give you more details about how you can sled with your dog. Who knows? Imagine your Husky winning the Iditarod one day.
- » **Part 6:** Every *For Dummies* book has the Part of Tens. Here I give you short bursts of fun advice about traveling with your Husky and some outdoor activities you can consider doing with your Husky.

In this book, I refer to your Husky as a male for consistency. I understand you may have a female. No matter your Husky's gender, this book can help you.

Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, I made the following assumptions about you, my dear reader:

- » **You're interested in getting a Siberian Husky.** You've read great things about the breed and want to find the right one for you to join your family.
- » **You already have a Husky.** You're looking for some advice about living with your new family member. You may have kids or other pets, and you want to make the transition smoothly.
- » **You want to discover the basics about taking care of your Husky.** You want the lowdown on feeding, grooming, exercising, and keeping your Husky safe and healthy.

No matter if any of these assumptions apply to you or you just love reading about dogs, then this new edition of *Siberian Huskies For Dummies* is for you.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, you'll find charming pictures in the margins next to certain paragraphs. But these aren't merely for your amusement; they actually serve a purpose. And I explain the purpose here:



TIP

When you run across this icon, you know you're in for a useful bit of information on how to do things with or for your Husky.



REMEMBER

Some things are so important they bear repeating, and I use this icon to indicate what information will be good for you to stash away.



WARNING

This eye-catching icon alerts you to potential hazards or problems that you need to watch out for.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When you see this icon, you're sure to find some very useful information that's bound to impress your friends at the next neighborhood get-together. But it isn't essential that you pay attention to this stuff if you're just looking for the basics.



DUMMIES
APPROVED

When you see this icon, you're sure to find products or services that are particularly helpful for Husky owners.

Where to Go from Here

You may not know much about Siberians, but the fact that you've picked up this book shows that you care and want to have a good relationship with your dog. In this book, you have all the information you need to get started on a lifetime of enjoying your Siberian Husky.

This book is a reference, not a tutorial. You don't have to read it from cover to cover if you just want to get a glimpse of owning a Siberian before you get down to the basics. Just use the table of contents or index to find the topics that interest you and go from there. Start with your needs and interests.

If you don't already own a Siberian and don't know much about the breed, start with Part 1. If you have a little more background with the breed, maybe you want to check out Part 2. Or maybe the chapters in Part 3 where you figure out how to live everyday with your Husky have caught your fancy. Go ahead and skip around. That's what this book is for.

You can also refer to www.dummies.com and search for Siberian Huskies for a handy Cheat Sheet for some helpful information that you can reference as you need.

1 Getting to Know Your Siberian Husky

IN THIS PART . . .

Get an overview of what inviting a Husky into your home means and what you can do to make it go smoothly.

Understand what the characteristics of the breed standard are and what makes a Siberian Husky a Siberian Husky, including size, body, neck, skull, teeth, color, and so on.

Know how to differentiate between a Siberian and the other types of dogs that are often confused with Siberians.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Recognizing a Husky for what it is
- » Choosing a new member of your family
- » Bringing your Husky home
- » Taking care of your Husky

Chapter **1**

The Lowdown on Siberian Huskies, Just the Basics

Congratulations! You're leaning toward welcoming a Siberian Husky into your home, or perhaps you've already made that decision and Smoky is already a part of your family. No matter, this chapter gives you a brief overview to this book and serves as your jumping-off point to the world of Siberian Huskies.

Knowing What to Look for: A Husky's Breed Standard

Figuring out what a Husky is (and isn't) can sometimes be confusing, especially with all the lookalikes out there (like Alaskan Malamutes, Samoyeds, Alaskan Klee Kai, Northern Inuits, wolves, and wolf-hybrids, among others). To know that you're looking at a Siberian Husky, pay close attention to the following standards:

- » Size
- » Body

- » Front and back views
- » Neck
- » Skull
- » Teeth
- » Expression
- » Eyes
- » Ears
- » Feet
- » Tail
- » Coat texture
- » Color
- » Nose
- » Gait
- » Temperament

Chapter 2 discusses these standards in greater detail to help you identify a true Siberian Husky.

HUSKIES STARTED WITH THE CHUKCHIS

The *Chukchis* are a semi-nomadic, reindeer-hunting people of northeastern Siberia. Today, the Chukchi population totals about 16,000; there is evidence that, in the past, the population was greater. Both the climatic and political oppression they have endured over the centuries have given the Chukchis the nickname “Apaches of the North.” Of course, they don’t call *themselves* that. They call themselves the *Luoravetlan*, which means “the genuine people.”

The word *Siberia* is almost synonymous with “cold,” but the earliest Chukchis probably enjoyed a milder climate than they do today. In those warmer times, they apparently relied on dogs primarily for help in hunting the plentiful reindeer. About 3,000 years ago, however, the climate changed drastically for the worse. The reindeer had to travel farther and farther to find food, and the deer-dependent Chukchis had to travel with them, taking their entire households along.

It was in this way that the Siberian dogs added sled hauling to their list of accomplishments. These animals were so highly prized that only very young, very old, and very sick

Chukchis were allowed to ride in the sleds as passengers. The sleds were mostly used for hauling goods; the people walked. Sometimes the Chukchi women and children pulled the sleds also — right along with the dogs.

The Chukchis gave birth to a rich culture. They developed an elaborate religion and conceived of a heaven whose gates were guarded by a pair of their Chukchi dogs. Furthermore, they believed that anyone who mistreated a dog wouldn't be allowed into Chukchi heaven.

Because the Chukchis used reindeer to pull the heaviest loads, they placed a premium on developing their dogs for speed, endurance, and agility. It paid off. No other breed in the world can haul a light load as fast and far as the Siberian Husky — and on so little food.

The Russians are coming!

The Chukchis were always a thorn in the side of the Russians. They declined to surrender during the 1700s when the Russians had conquered every other Siberian people in their effort to control the fur trade. They'd just pack up their things and move farther on, making the Russians chase them some more. Sometimes, the Chukchis moved their entire settlement onto an iceberg and floated away. Finally, a Russian general named Pavlutskiy decided he could handle the Chukchis. In an incredibly stupid move, Pavlutskiy plowed into a narrow ravine to finish them off. The Chukchis were just sitting there in ambush, not daring to hope that the general could possibly be dumb enough to trap himself. But he was. The Chukchis then killed the Russians, including Pavlutskiy, and confiscated their guns. Because they had no idea how to use their newfound weapons, they captured some disaffected Russian serfs, who gladly passed along their firearms lore. The serfs didn't like the Russian army or the Cossacks any better than the Chukchis did. By this time, the Russians decided that it would be smarter all around just to leave the Chukchis alone.

The Communists versus the Huskies

In the 1930s, the Communists tried to destroy every vestige of traditional, non-Soviet culture, including the native dog breeds. They decided sled dogs were outdated and should be replaced by motorized vehicles. At least that's what they thought until they got to Chukchi land and found that all their up-to-date motorized vehicles got stuck in the snow.

In 1947, the Soviet Congress, which apparently had nothing better to do, decided that the Workers' Paradise really didn't need any sled dogs or reindeer-herding dogs, and they reclassified the hunting dogs into four new subdivisions, none of which corresponded to any real breed. The Husky was left out of these classifications; the Soviets, in their infinite wisdom, decided that they were too small to pull anything, even though they had been hauling sleds all over Siberia for the past few thousand years or so.

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The Siberians were indeed much smaller than the other Arctic breeds, topping out at around 50 pounds, which is why the Russians sneered at them. But the Chukchis knew that nothing could surpass their dogs for long-distance sledding. When the Chukchis needed more power, they simply hitched up more dogs. And because of the Siberian's excellent temperament, as many as 18 or 20 dogs could be hitched to a single sled. And there was no fighting.

Besides, Siberian Huskies had other advantages. Because they had been raised in a family setting and not left out to fend for themselves, they could be trusted with children, and they could run faster, longer, and on less food than any other breed in the world.

Understanding Why Huskies Make Great Pets

Siberian Huskies are great dogs. They're devoted to their owners and can be a great companion. However, Huskies do require attention because they're full of energy. That means if you're seriously considering buying or adopting a Husky, be prepared that he'll need lots of physical exercise, loving attention, and stability. Owning a dog, especially one with the relentless energy of a Siberian, is something you shouldn't underestimate.

That being said, consider these factors when bringing a new Husky home:

- » **Children:** Most Huskies are good with children, although not every Husky is, but the good thing is Huskies are playful and can adapt as long as your children treat your Husky well.
- » **Cost:** Owning any kind of dog can be costly, after you consider medical care, high-quality food, grooming, supplies, toys, training classes, and so on.
- » **Your house:** If you prefer a meticulously clean home, a Husky may not be your best bet. They can shed, and if they don't get enough exercise, they can focus their attention on things you don't want them to, like your couch pillows or legs to your coffee table.



REMEMBER

Having a large fenced backyard is ideal because a Husky needs plenty of space to exercise. If you don't have a fenced yard, be prepared to take your Husky on a daily walk.

- » **Climate:** Huskies prefer cooler climates because of their thick coats, and they're extra susceptible to heat exhaustion.
- » **Time and exercise:** Huskies are balls of energy and require a lot of attention and exercise.
- » **Other pets:** Siberians usually get along well with other dogs, but be mindful of other pets, including cats, unless the Siberian has been around the cat since puppyhood.

I provide more in-depth specifics about these points and others in Chapter 3.

Picking a Husky: Where to Go and Where to Avoid

When you're looking for a Husky, you have a few options, some options are much better than the other ones, ranging from shelters to breeders.



WARNING

I can't emphasize enough. Don't buy your Husky at a pet store because pet stores often work with puppy mills — dogs are treated poorly. Your chances of getting a sick dog increase exponentially, which means higher vet bills too.

Here are the best places to get a Husky for your family:

- » **Breeders:** For a genetically sound, good-tempered, and healthy Siberian puppy, a breeder is by far your best bet. Breeders take special care in ensuring their dogs are healthy. Many breeders show dogs and participate in dog sports. However, they often sell their puppies that aren't suited for showing or sports, which makes for great pets for you.
- » **Shelters and rescue organizations:** If you want an older Husky that was given up by its previous owners, shelters and rescue organizations are great. Their dogs are often loving and loveable and just need a good home.



TIP

Just ask your local shelter or rescue organization about the Huskies they have up for adoption. They often let you visit and spend some time with the dog to see if you and the dog mesh well. Adopting and acclimating an older dog is often less time-consuming task than getting a puppy.

Chapter 3 explains in greater detail about these options and how you can find your new family member.

OLAF SWENSON SAVES THE DAY

Sadly, there may be no pure Siberian Huskies left in the land of their birth. They disappeared during the Stalinist purges (along with most of the Chukchis and a few million dissident Russians). Happily, some Huskies were exported to North America first; the last of them made the trip in 1929. Arctic explorer and fur trader Olaf Swenson had purchased some at the then exorbitant price of \$150. Swenson had cultivated friendly relationships with the Chukchis for many years. Indeed, he was the only outsider ever willingly allowed into Chukchi territory.

Swenson admired both the friendly temperament of the Siberians and the gentle treatment the dogs received from their Chukchi families. He understood that the two factors were related. Many of the other northern breeds received nothing but brutal treatment at the hands of their owners, and in time became brutal themselves.

There was one dog in particular Swenson coveted. He spent two years trying to buy a certain Billkoff (Snowball). He was always rebuffed, no matter how much he offered. Once though he went out of his way to perform a small favor for the Chukchi. Swenson didn't see his friend for a year, but when he visited him again, his Chukchi friend seemed glad to see him. Going over to Billkoff, he took the dog by the collar and led him over to Swenson. Then he placed his hand on the dog's head. "Your dog," he said solemnly. The man refused to take a penny for him.

Billkoff proved to be the finest lead dog Swenson ever owned. Even the most recalcitrant dogs on the team would follow his lead. This was a critical advantage. From the team's point of view, the lead dog may be even more important than the driver. After all, the driver has no reins to guide the team — they're following the lead dog.

Knowing that the unique Siberian Husky was in danger of disappearing forever, Swenson had some of the finest Chukchi dogs shipped to America. Some went to Maine; others were shipped to Quebec. Still others were bred to the dogs of the legendary Leonhard Seppala (see the later sidebar for more about Seppala).

Introducing Your Husky to His New Home

Helping your new Husky adapt and settle into your home can be daunting. After all, everything is new and strange to him. The experience can be enjoyable and help you bond with your new family member. Chapter 5 discusses everything from feeding him his first meal to reassuring him on his first night in your home. If your new Husky isn't potty trained, you'll also want to start housetraining as soon as possible.



TIP

Before you bring home your new Husky or soon thereafter, make sure you make an appointment with your veterinarian for a complete checkup.

The following sections touch on a few other important areas to remember as you bring a Husky home.

Ensuring you have the right supplies

When you bring your new Husky home, you want to make sure you properly outfit him to make his and your life more comfortable. Here are some important supplies you need:

- » **Collar:** A collar that fits is important because you attach the ID tag to it and the leash for walks.
- » **Leash:** A sturdy leash, also called a *lead*, allows you to go on walks and keep your Husky out of harm's way.
- » **Harness:** You may prefer a harness to a collar. A harness fits around your dog's chest and torso rather than his neck.
- » **ID tag:** Huskies like to make a run for it, so having their name and your contact information on the ID tag is imperative.
- » **Food and water bowls:** You want to feed and water your Husky in style, and the best option is stainless steel or chrome.
- » **Bed:** A wide variety of types of beds are available. Just make sure it's machine washable to get rid of Husky hair and any odors.
- » **Crate:** Even if you don't plan on your Husky sleeping in a crate, having one is so important because more than likely your Husky will like to get away from everything in the crate. A wide assortment are available.
- » **Toys:** Toys are great ways to keep your Husky entertained. Use different types of toys to stimulate him so he doesn't get bored. Getting him a combination chew and toy is my top recommendation.

I talk about these supplies and more in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Listening to your Husky

Your Husky will communicate with you with both verbal and nonverbal ways. Being able to understand what he's saying or experiencing can help build the bond between the two of you and even alleviate any potential issues. These sections give you an overview of the ways your Husky may communicate with you.

Verbal: Hey, listen to me

Dogs communicate verbally for an assortment of reasons. Here is an overview to them (Chapter 6 provides more in-depth explanations):

- » **Barking:** The good news is that Huskies bark less than other breeds. They may occasionally bark to mark territory.
- » **Howling:** A howl is long and drawn-out may mean your Husky is communicating with his pack or other Huskies, warning intruders, or expressing pain or sorrow.
- » **Whining:** Your Husky probably wants something from you, like to be let in, go out, or petted.
- » **Growling:** If he growls, he's more than likely warning whoever he's growling at.
- » **Yelping:** Your Husky is in pain if he yelps.

Nonverbal: Pay attention to me

A Husky can also communicate to you through his body language. Here are some common behaviors to watch for and a brief explanation on each (I provide more details in Chapter 6):

- » **Circling and sniffing:** Dogs exhibit this behavior when greeting other dogs.
- » **Mounting:** Mounting is a sign of dominance where your Husky is trying to show who's the leader of the pack.
- » **Pawing:** Sometimes pawing is a sign of dominance. Other times he may be trying to get your attention.
- » **Bowing:** A Husky that bows is usually exhibiting play-soliciting behavior.
- » **Belly-rubbing response:** Who doesn't like a good belly rub? Your Husky is no different.
- » **Licking or tail-chewing:** These behaviors can indicate a wide variety of things, including a nervous habit, the need to eliminate, or fleas. Inspect your Husky to see if you can figure out what's causing this behavior.

Helping your Husky make new friends

You can socialize your Husky so he's comfortable being around other dogs and other people in these suggestions: